

# CITY HALL~ COUNTY BUILDING

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

Submitted to the  
Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks  
on September 8, 1981

## CITY HALL-COUNTY BUILDING

Block bounded by LaSalle, Clark, Randolph, and Washington streets  
Chicago, Illinois

Architects: Holabird and Roche

Dates of Construction: 1906-07 (Cook County Building)  
1909-11 (Chicago City Hall)

For most of the past one hundred and thirty years, the governments of Chicago and Cook County have shared a building on the same site. The present Chicago City Hall-Cook County Building is the third jointly tenanted seat of government to occupy the block bounded by LaSalle, Clark, Randolph, and Washington streets, which in the nineteenth century was known as Courthouse Square. The design of this building was the result of an architectural competition sponsored by the county in 1905. Although the noted Chicago architectural firm of Holabird and Roche won second place in the competition, theirs was the design that was actually built. The structure was erected in two parts: the County Building was constructed between 1906 and 1907 and City Hall was built between 1909 and 1911. For over seventy years, this monumental edifice has not only served as an imposing symbol of local government, but has also functioned as an efficient office building in which the daily activities of scores of city and county departments are conducted.

### Early Seats of Government in Chicago

Prior to 1853, the governments of Cook County and the City of Chicago occupied separate buildings in what is now downtown Chicago. Cook County was created by an act of the Illinois state legislature on January 15, 1831. That act also provided that Chicago would be the county seat and granted to the county title to the block bounded by LaSalle, Clark, Randolph, and Washington streets which was to be used for a courthouse. In 1835, the first county courthouse was built at the northeast corner of the block. This simple Greek revival building had one story and a basement. The courtroom and jury rooms were on the main floor, and the clerk's office, recorder's office, and vaults were in the basement. The brick structure measured thirty by sixty feet and had a wooden portico with four Doric columns and a pediment across the facade.

Chicago's early "city halls" were not as imposing as the courthouse. The town of Chicago had been incorporated in 1833 and on January 23, 1837, a group of citizens met in the Saloon Building at the southeast corner of Clark and Lake streets to take the first step toward procuring a city charter. After Chicago was incorporated as a city on March 4, 1837, the Common Council rented a room in the Saloon Building for its

use and for the use of the Municipal Court. The Saloon Building was a three-story frame structure with stores on the first floor, offices on the second, and on the third a large hall (called the "Saloon," a popularization of the French word *salon*) which was used for political and religious meetings, concerts, shows, and other entertainments. The city government remained there five years and in 1842 rented space in a two-story frame building at the northeast corner of LaSalle and Randolph streets, across from Courthouse Square. The first structure the city built for its own use was the two-story, brick and stone Market Building which was constructed in 1848 on State Street just north of Randolph. Designed by John Mills Van Osdel, Chicago's first architect, the Market building had stalls on the first floor for a public market, and on the second floor were a library, clerk's office, and rooms for the Common Council. Within two years, the council decided that additional space was needed.

By 1850, the county government had outgrown the courthouse as well, and the two governmental bodies agreed to construct a building they could occupy jointly. To repay a \$30,000 debt it owed the city for municipal services and for other considerations, the county granted the city the use of the west half of Courthouse Square. The county agreed to pay three-fourths of the cost of a combined courthouse-city hall, and the city paid the remainder. Van Osdel was chosen as architect and designed an imposing two-story, brick and stone Greek revival building surmounted by two low domes and a cupola. Construction began in 1851 and the building was completed in 1853. Soon additional space was needed, and in 1858 a third story and tall central dome were added. The building was further enlarged by the addition of east and west wings in 1869.

Two years later, the courthouse-city hall was completely destroyed by the Chicago Fire of October 8-10, 1871. As the fire raged, the council met in a temporary city hall on the second floor of a building at Washington and Ann streets west of the burned area. On October 12, the council voted to temporarily relocate to the West Madison Street Police Station. At the same time, they directed the Board of Public Works to work with the county Board of Supervisors to plan a permanent new courthouse-city hall for Courthouse Square. The city government remained on West Madison Street fourteen months. By January, 1873, a temporary city hall had been built at the southeast corner of LaSalle and Adams. This was a two-story brick building, familiarly known as "the old Rookery," which had been constructed around a large, elevated water tank. (Burnham and Root's 1886 Rookery Building would later be constructed on the same site.) The 1873 Rookery served as Chicago's city hall for the next twelve years.

In June, 1872, the city and county governments announced an architectural competition for a design for the proposed new courthouse. The winners were announced the following year, but neither government wanted to build the winning design. They paid the prize monies nevertheless and the

county subsequently commissioned James J. Egan to design the building. Egan designed a six-story, brick and stone French Renaissance structure with monumental thirty-five foot granite Corinthian columns. The county had the funds to begin construction first, as the state had previously authorized the sale of \$1,500,000 in bonds to build a new courthouse and North Side jail. After numerous delays, the county building was completed in 1882 and the city hall in 1885. Because the structure was already overcrowded when it was opened, the city and county began discussing the possibility of constructing an even larger building.

The discussions were hypothetical however, as neither government had the money in 1885 to construct a new building. Eventually structural problems made a new building necessary. In 1898, a portion of the crumbling walls of the building had to be removed at a cost of \$8,000. As a result of this expense, an ordinance was introduced into the City Council to sell the old city hall and build a new one on the West Side. The ordinance was voted down. In January, 1905, an explosion and fire caused \$10,000 damage to the upper floor, attic, and roof of the county side of the building. An examination revealed that a portion of the foundation had sunk six inches, shearing a gas pipe. One week after the fire, the county board created a commission to determine whether the county should repair and remodel the existing building or build a new one. The following month, the commission reported that construction of a new courthouse was imperative and that a long delay was out of the question.

Once again, an architectural competition was held for the design of a new city hall-county building. Although it was an open competition, seven prominent architectural firms--D.H. Burnham and Company, Frost and Granger, Huehl and Schmidt, and Holabird and Roche, all of Chicago; Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge of Boston; and Carrere and Hastings and George B. Post and Son of New York--were specially invited to participate. Burnham, Post, and Carrere and Hastings dropped out of the competition and were replaced by Barnett, Haynes, and Barnett of St. Louis, and Louis Sullivan and Jarvis Hunt of Chicago. First prize went to Barnett, Haynes, and Barnett, second to Holabird and Roche, and third to Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge. Nevertheless, the commission went to Holabird and Roche, possibly because it was a local firm. Their design provided the city and county with a building that is both a monumental civic structure and an efficient office building.

#### Holabird and Roche's City Hall-County Building

By the time of the 1905 competition for the design of a new city hall-county building, Holabird and Roche had established a reputation for designing efficient office buildings. Founded in 1881, the firm had since 1889 spent over fifteen years producing straightforward and utilitarian designs for tall downtown office buildings. Their Marquette, Old Colony,

Gage, and Brooks buildings and their addition to the Monadnock Block-- all with strongly articulated facades that forcefully express the cellular geometry of the supporting skeleton frame--placed the firm in the mainstream of the Chicago school movement. The city hall-county building called for the same efficient planning of interior space that characterized these office structures, but the facade was to be less a direct expression of structural technique and more an imposing statement of the dignity of local government.

A monumental classicism was chosen as an appropriate form to make this statement. Long colonnades consisting of 94-foot high Corinthian columns are the major feature of the exterior design. The building is eleven stories high and is faced to the tops of the Corinthian columns with Woodbury gray granite. Above the capitals the sheathing is gray terra cotta that matches the granite almost exactly. The facades are divided into three major horizontal elements. The first is a three-story base of smooth granite ashlar which rises 70 feet. Above the base rise the majestic Corinthian columns which are six stories high and consist of a 6' high moulded plinth and base, a 75'6" shaft, and a 12'6" capital. The colonnades are strengthened at the corners by massive piers with Corinthian pilasters. Above the colonnade are a 24' high entablature and a 17' attic story. An elaborate cornice originally separated the entablature from the attic story, but it has been removed. Three tall central doorways mark the entrances on each of the four sides of the building. Those on the Clark Street side are flanked by relief sculptures by Herman A. MacNeil of New York and those on the LaSalle Street side are flanked by similar relief sculptures by John F. Glanagan, also of New York.

Again, the county had the funds to proceed with construction first. The old county building was demolished and on January 18, 1906, excavation for the new building began. The cornerstone was laid on March 21, 1906, and the building was completed the following year. The first county offices were moved in on July 6, 1907. The following year, demolition of the old city hall commenced. Construction of the present building began in January, 1909, and was completed two years later. The present City Hall was dedicated on February 27, 1911.

Shortly thereafter, a critic wrote of it:

In "scale" the (Corinthian) order exceeds anything west of Albany....This would, of itself, make a building noteworthy anywhere, but it is also to be said that it has been well and faithfully studied in mass, in scale, and in detail. It is not only much the most impressive thing of its kind that Chicago has to show, but one of the most impressive in the United States, and in the interior...there is not only a faithful study of style, but features which show an escape from the style into vigor of individual invention, and a richness which has even elements of novelty in decorative effect.

The first-floor lobbies and the hallways that run through the building from Clark Street to LaSalle Street and from Washington Street to Randolph Street are the most impressive interior spaces remaining. They are quite wide to provide ample circulation and access to the elevators. The walls are of polished Botticino marble. The ceilings are flattened groin vaults supported by arches of reinforced concrete faced with polished marble. The ribs of the vaults are also marble, and the infill is marble mosaic. The elevator lobbies above the first floor also have walls and pilasters of polished Botticino marble. This same marble was used for the five-foot-high wainscoting of the main corridors on the upper floors, and the three-foot-high wainscoting of the stairhalls.

The original two-story Council Chamber was a similarly impressive interior space. It was oak paneled and had Italian Renaissance detailing. The chamber is 65 feet by 96 feet. In order to provide a column-free space and support the weight of the nine office floors above the void of the chamber, the architects employed built-up girders with a clear span of 65 feet and a maximum weight of forty-four tons. These were not fabricated at the site and had to be transported with great difficulty from the steel works on the north branch of the Chicago River. A representative of Holabird and Roche later recalled the summer nights in 1909 when the girders were transported to the site on specially built wagons:

Probably no such load ever has been put upon a wagon as was that 88,000 pound girder which overhangs the council chamber....We could hope to move it only in the night, after the last of traffic virtually was gone from the streets. Rush Street Bridge was the only bridge on which we could cross, and then only after we had laid steel tracks for the wheels.

At the building, one engine hoist has been used on every other piece of steel. On this 88,000 pound girder, as on the 75,000 and the two 70,000 pound girders, two engines were set and the steel grappled at each end. With the council chamber on the second floor, two floors in height to the ceiling, and each of these big girders to clear the ceiling of the chamber and rising a full floor space to the level of the vault floor, you can imagine how I sat there with cold chills and hot feverishness alternating, hoping that no accident would occur in either engine to stop the steady, even rising of those loads. Yet there wasn't a kink in the handling of any of them.

The depth of these girders provides an intermediate floor in the building, labeled 3M. A fire completely destroyed the Council Chamber in 1957, and the following year a remodeled chamber was dedicated.

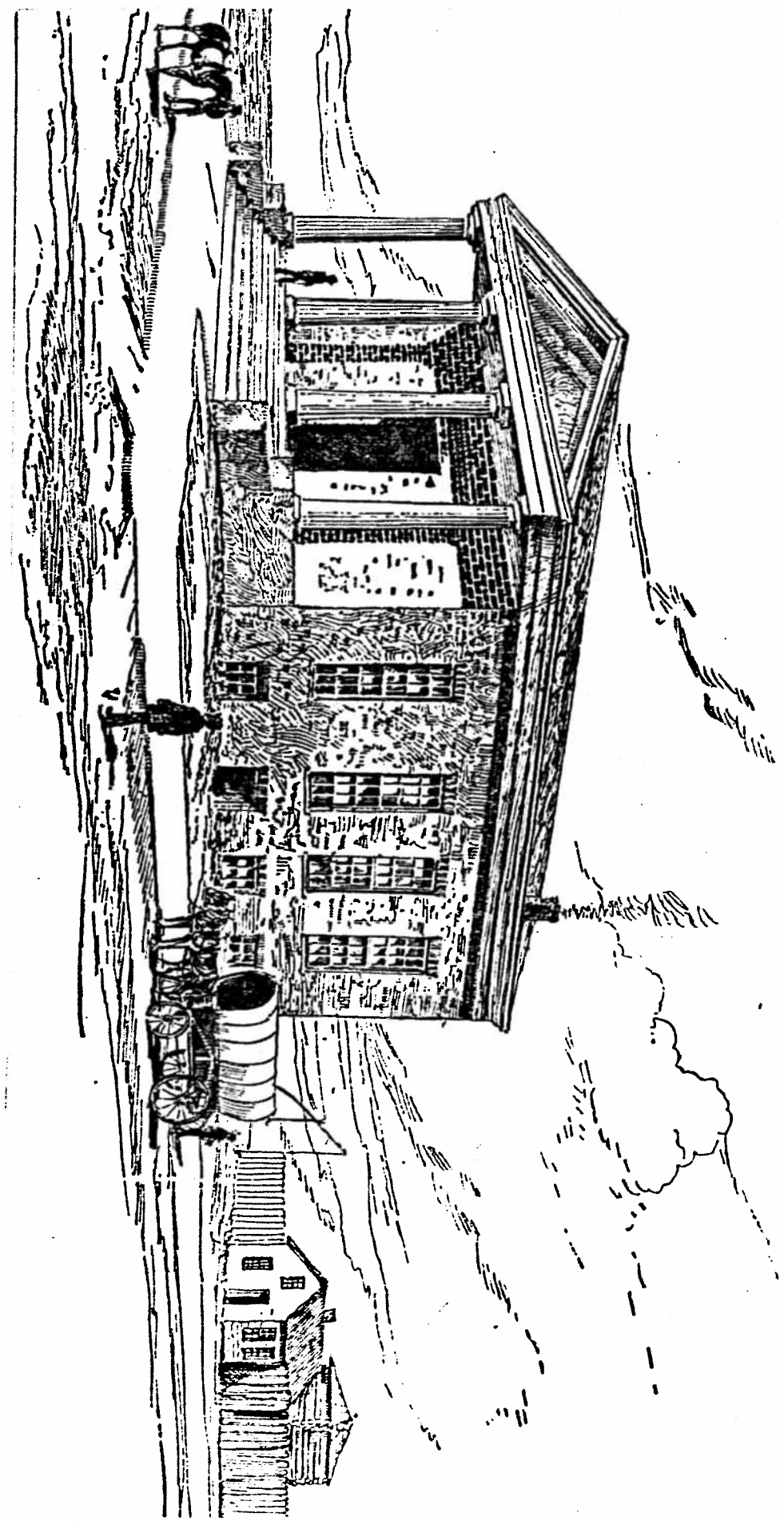
Even before City Hall was completed, city officials had doubts about its capacity. Before the decade was over, the city began renting office space elsewhere for various city departments, and by 1940 the city's rent bill was \$50,000 annually. The county faced the same problem and proposed to add more stories to the County Building. After it was determined that this idea was impractical and inconsistent with the original design, the county proposed the construction of a twenty-two story county administration building to be located on the west half of the block just east of the County Building. This proposal eventually resulted in the Richard J. Daley Civic Center. The thirty-one story Daley Center was constructed between 1963 and 1965 to provide additional courtrooms and offices for the city and county governments. The building echoes, in a contemporary idiom, the strength and dignity of the City Hall-County Building. It is sited on the north half of the block bounded by Dearborn and Clark streets and Washington and Randolph streets; the south half of that block is occupied by the broad Daley Plaza which provides an impressive view of the City Hall-County Building.

Chicago's City Hall-County Building is an outstanding example of a municipal structure. Built at a time when the office space needs of government had overshadowed the public space needs, it was designed to be a functional and efficient office building by a firm known for its efficient office buildings. Holabird and Roche also understood the symbolic function of architecture, and here created a structure that in its strength, dignity, and vigor symbolizes the governmental functions it houses. The monumental edifice is a fitting symbol of the governments of the Cook County and the City of Chicago.

OPPOSITE

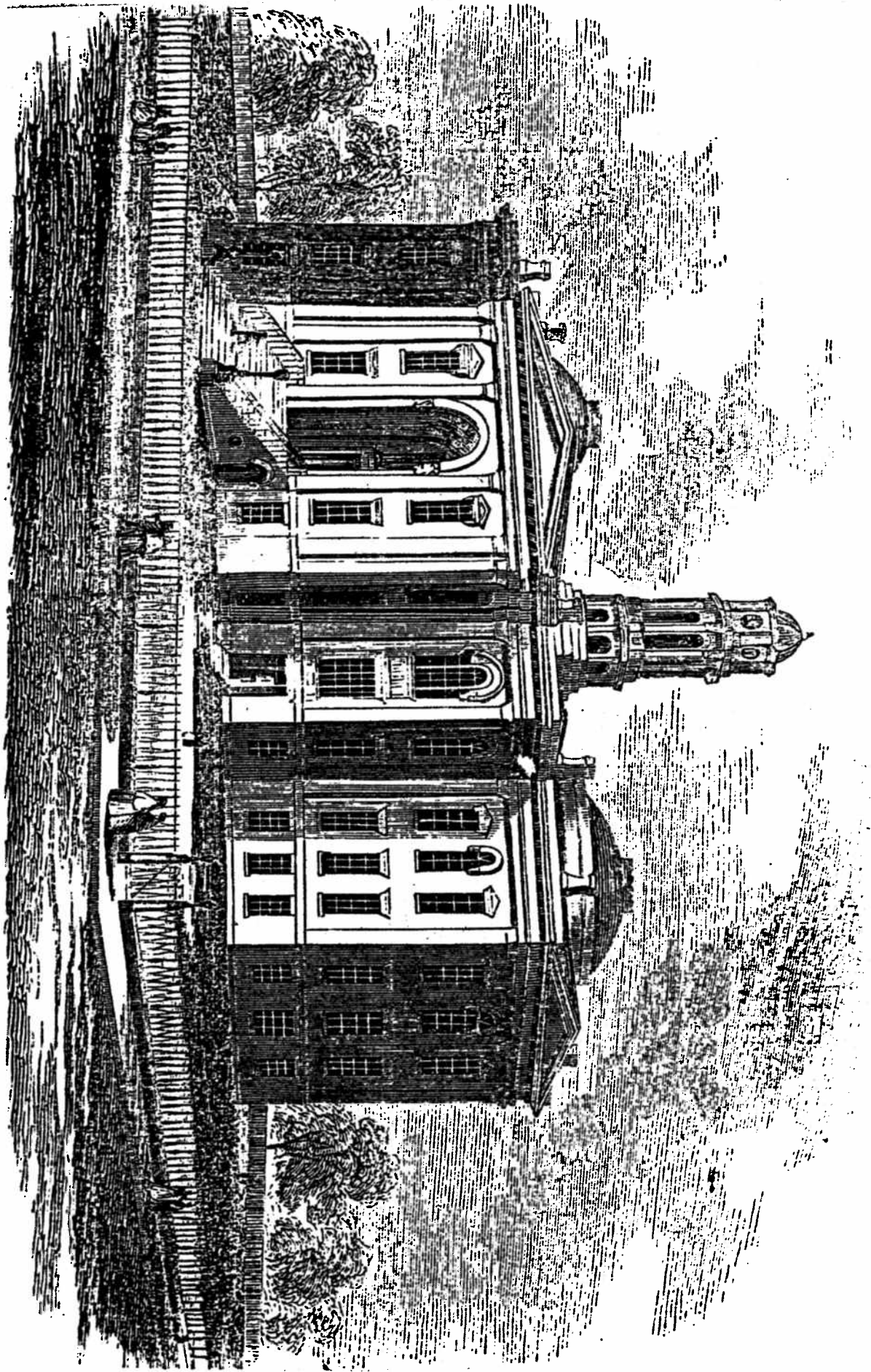
The first Cook County Courthouse was a one-story Greek revival building that stood at the northeast corner of Courthouse Square, the block where the present City Hall-County Building is located. Built in 1835, it served as the seat of county government until 1853 when the city and county erected the first combined courthouse-city hall.





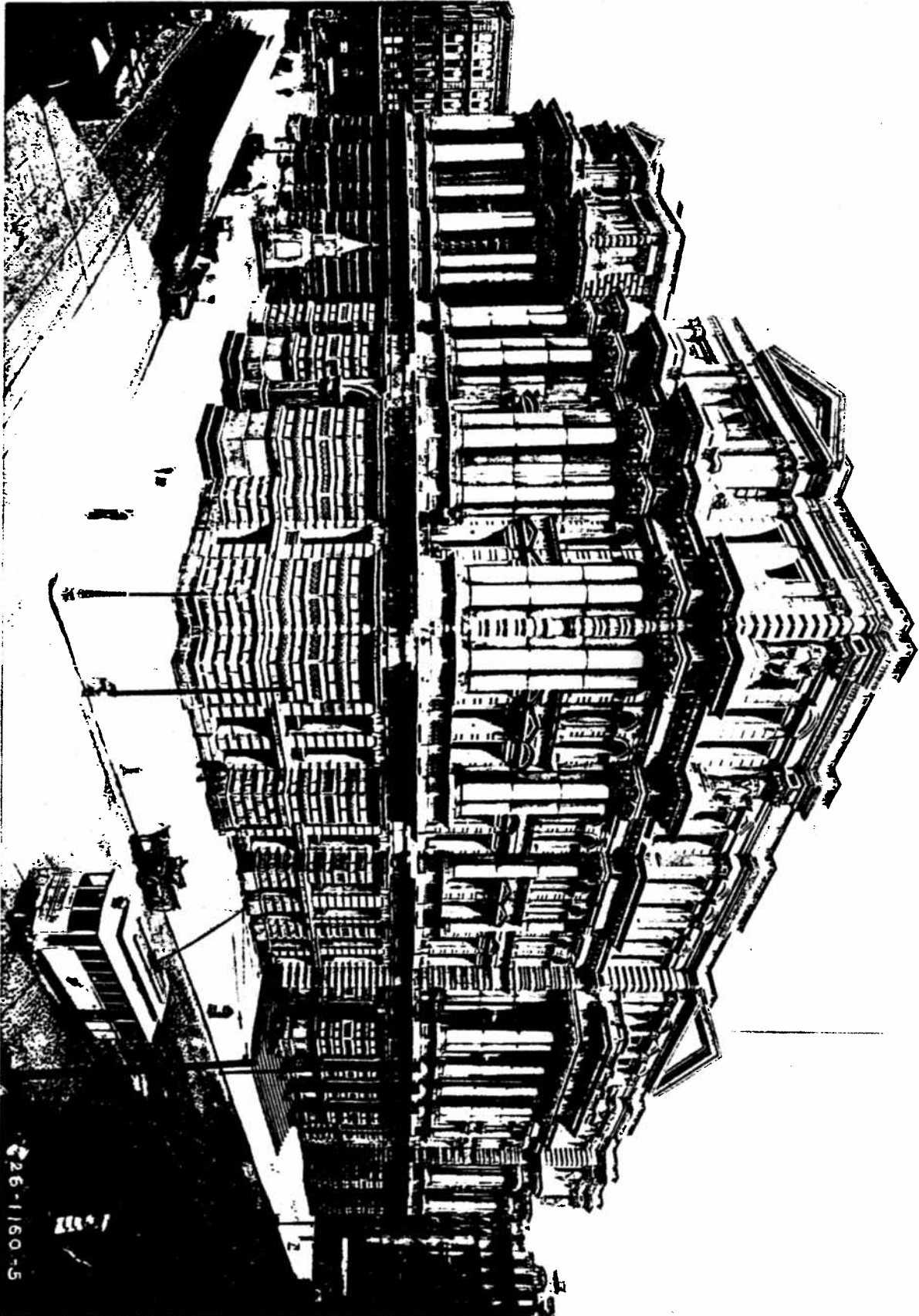
OPPOSITE

Chicago's first combined courthouse-city hall was built in 1853 on Courthouse Square. A third story, tall central dome, and east and west wings were later added. The building was destroyed by the Chicago Fire of October 8-10, 1871.



OPPOSITE

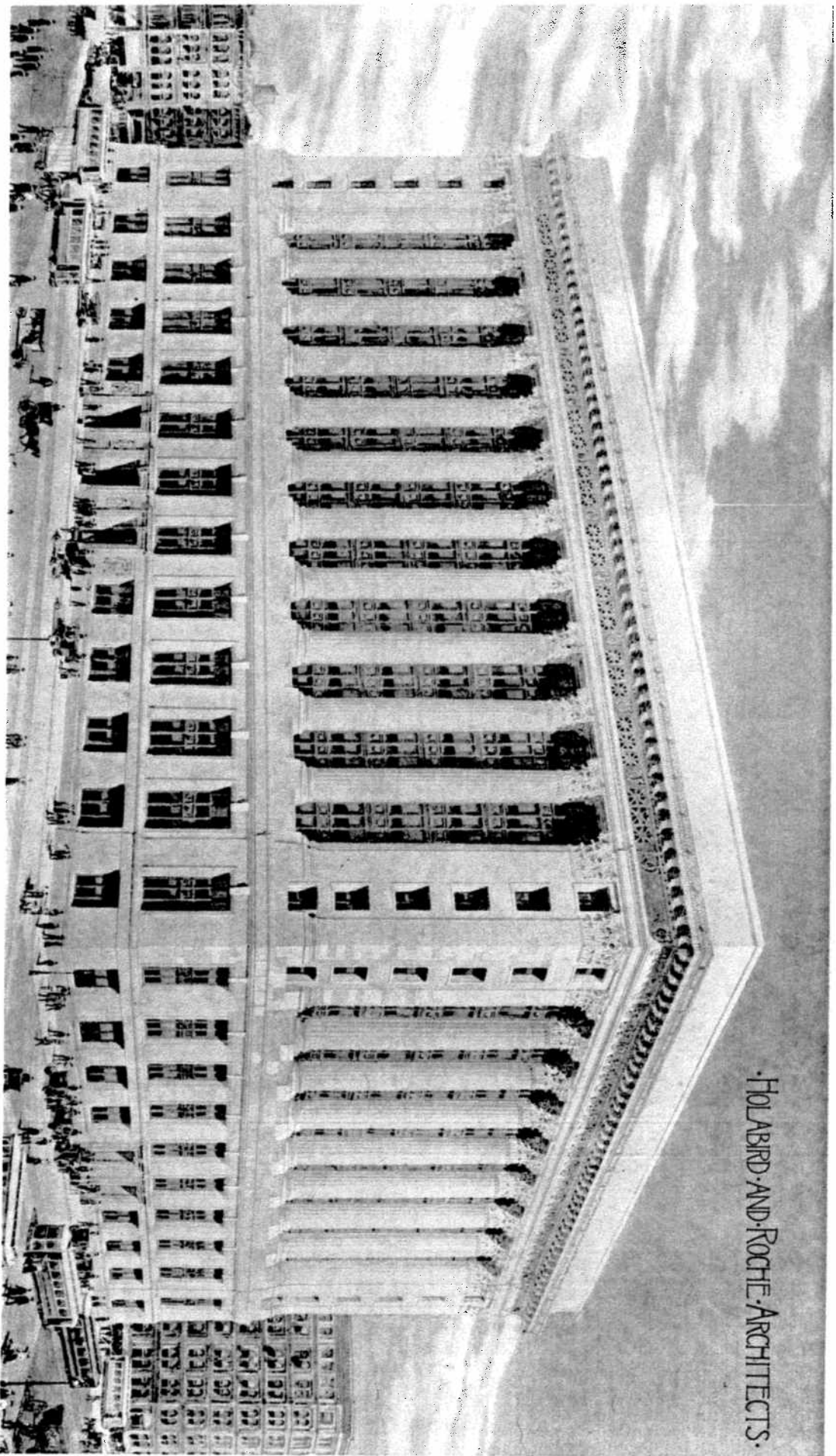
After the Chicago Fire, plans were made to build a new city hall-county building. Construction was delayed, and the new county building was not completed until 1882 and the new city hall was not finished until 1885. This French Renaissance structure served as the seat of county and city government until the present City Hall-County Building was built.



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OPPOSITE

The entry Holabird and Roche submitted to the 1905 competition for a new city hall-county building won second prize, but the prominent Chicago firm was awarded the commission for the building.



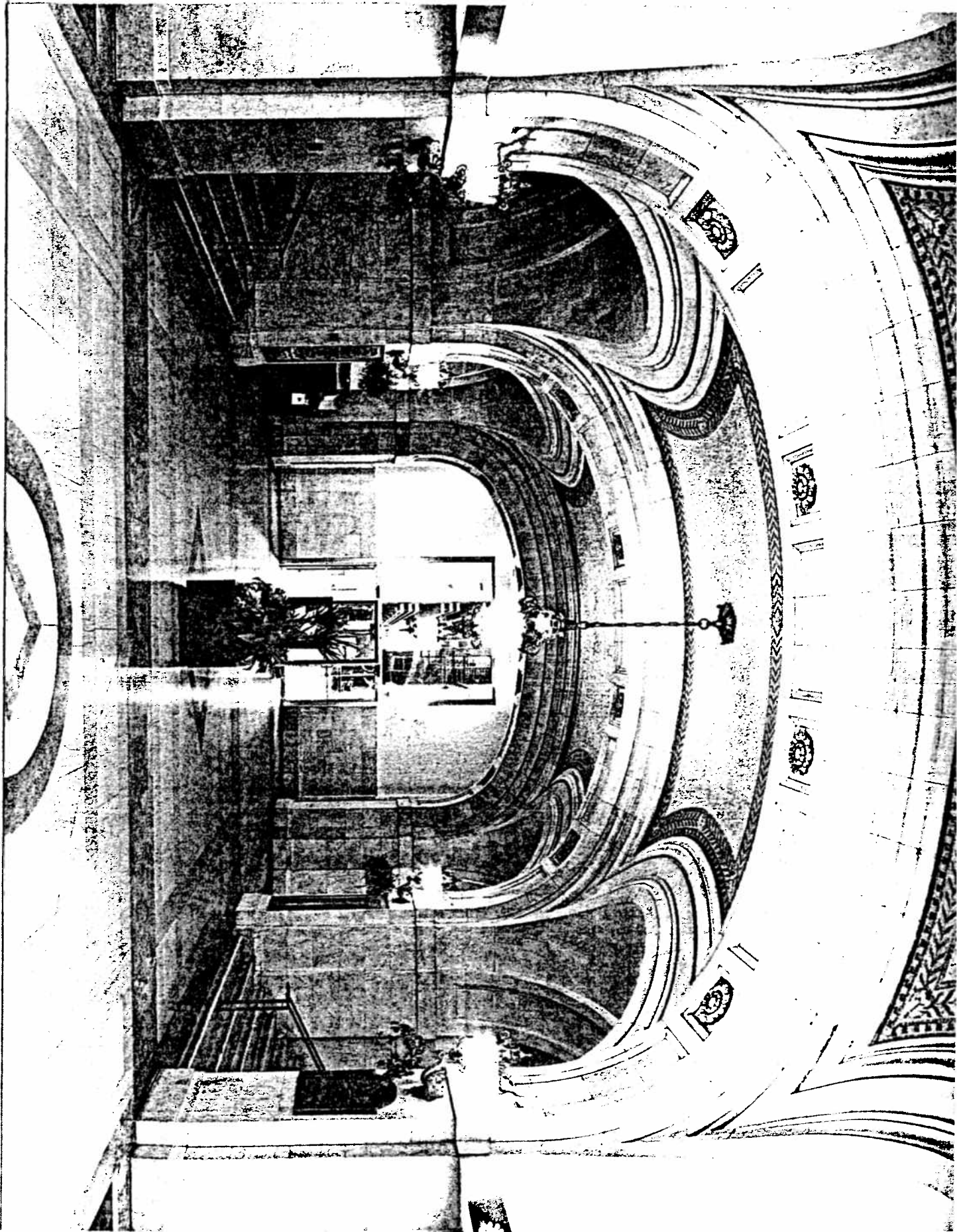
HOLABIRD AND ROCHE ARCHITECTS.

X. CHICAGO'S CITY HALL-COUNTY BUILDING - 1910-1981  
LaSalle, Washington, Clark and Randolph Streets - Architect's Rendering

OPPOSITE

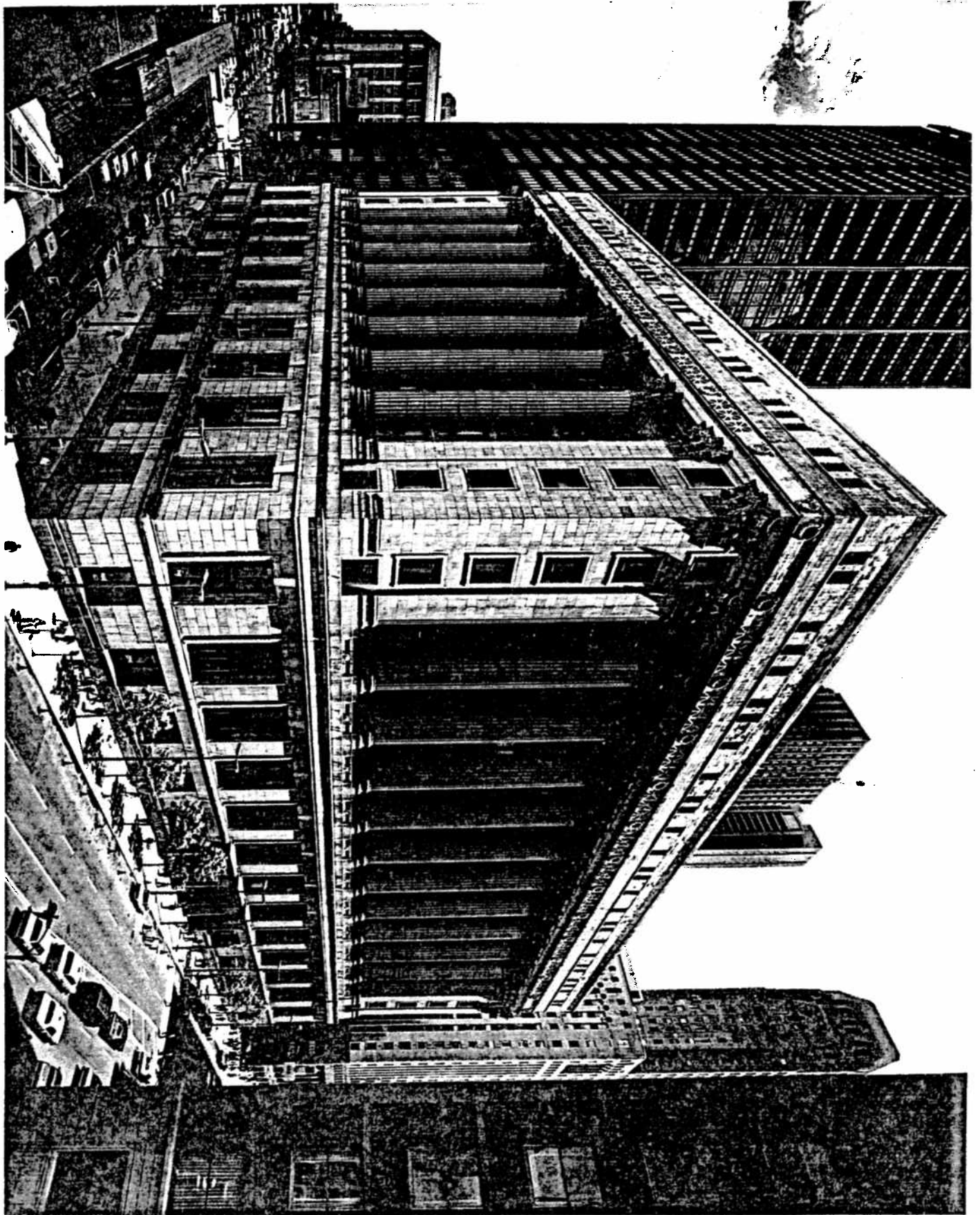
A lavish use of marbles and mosaics makes the entrance lobbies and first-floor hallways the most impressive interior space remaining.

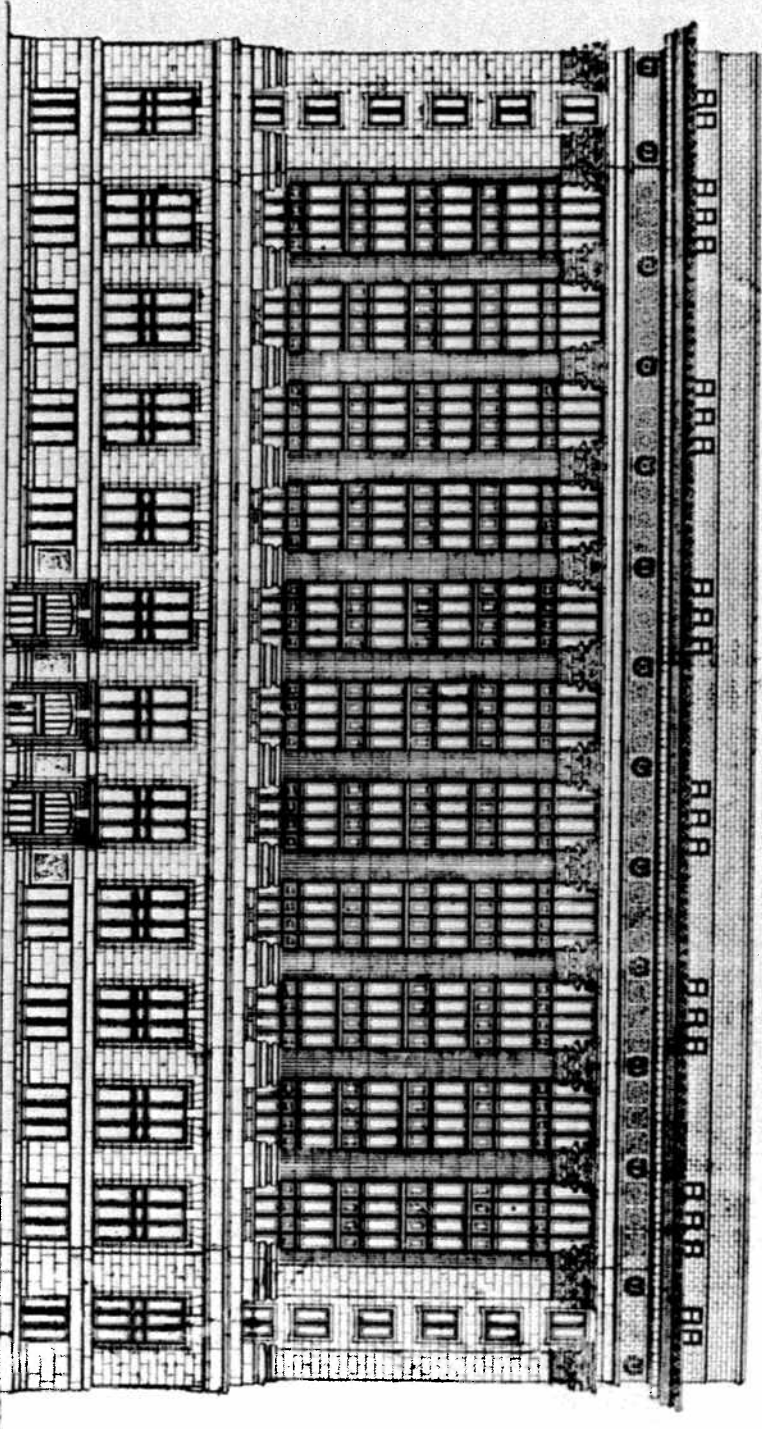




OPPOSITE

Chicago's City Hall-County Building serves as both a monumental civic structure and an efficient office building. The removal of the elaborate cornice above the entablature made the attic story more clearly visible. .  
(Hedrich-Blessing, photographers)





1910-1981  
Scale of Feet  
1/8" = 1'-0"

FRONT - ELEVATION -  
CITY - HALL -  
CHICAGO - ILLINOIS -  
Howard S. Foyt, Architects -  
1115 Monmouth Street, Chicago, Ill.

XI. CHICAGO CITY HALL - 1910-1981  
LaSalle Street Elevation